

# StayWellNews

## Community Resources for California's Seniors

### Summer Survival for Seniors



Yes, it's hot. That's no surprise. It's always hot at this time of year in California.

But you may be surprised at some of the ideas experts have for coping with the heat. Several of them are appropriate for those without air conditioning or those who are trying to minimize use of air conditioning to keep electricity bills down.

Seniors may be particularly susceptible to heat problems according to Calvin H. Hirsch, M.D., a geriatric medicine specialist at the University of California, Davis Medical Center in Sacramento. Individual health conditions such as heart disease make it more difficult for the body to circulate blood and dissipate heat. Medications such as diuretics can worsen the dehydrating effects of high temperatures. Obesity can make it especially difficult to keep cool in the heat of summer.

This summer threatens to be even more difficult as Californians face the prospect of rolling blackouts – likely to occur at the hottest times of the hottest days.

Dr. Hirsch offers seniors a number of tips to stay cooler and comfortable.

- 1. Use shades or draperies on sunny windows. Outdoor awnings or sunscreens can make a big difference.**
- 2. Eat lightly and drink lots of non-caffeinated and non-alcoholic beverages to prevent dehydration.**
- 3. A piece of cardboard covered with aluminum foil reflects sunlight and heat away from the house.**
- 4. Portable and ceiling fans in frequently used rooms can substitute for or assist an air conditioner.**
- 5. You may think of those little battery operated hand-held fans and misters as toys, but they can be very welcome, especially if the power goes out. You can often find them with the seasonal items at drugstores during the summer months.**
- 6. Stay in the coolest part of the house as much as possible. Even if it's not your favorite room, make it comfortable and avoid a lot of activity.**

Usually, the coolest place in the house is on the lowest floor. A shady spot outdoors may even be cooler than a spot in the house, especially if there's a breeze.

- 7. If you live in an area where it's safe to do so, leave windows open at night. Open windows on two sides to create cross ventilation.**
- 8. If it is too hot at home, spend a few hours at the library, go to a movie or visit a shopping mall or restaurant that is air conditioned.**
- 9. Check and, if necessary, upgrade the air conditioner. Vacuum, clean or replace air filters regularly.**
- 10. Rub wet washcloths over wrists, face and back of neck. For a quick cooldown, wrap ice cubes in a washcloth or use blue cooler packs.**

Remind children, friends and neighbors to keep in touch during periods of high heat. They should be aware that heat stroke can begin with flu-like symptoms that include loss of appetite, nausea, diarrhea, vomiting, headache, muscle cramping and light-headedness. Symptoms can develop quickly or slowly, over a period of days. If chilled liquids or other cooling measures don't help, the person should go to a hospital emergency room. Heat stroke can be serious – even fatal.



#### Hot Weather Checklist

Use shades or draperies on sunny windows.

Eat lightly and drink lots of water.

Use fans, misters and air conditioners.

Stay in the coolest part of the house or look for a shady spot outdoors.

Rub wet or iced washcloths over wrists, face and back of neck.

Head for the library, movie theatre or shopping mall.

If safe to do so, cool the house at night by opening windows.

Remind family, friends and neighbors to check with you during hottest days.

## What You Eat is What You Are

"Eat your vegetables."

You probably said it hundreds of times when you were raising your children.

What was good advice then is good advice now. Indeed, the older you get, the more important it is to eat healthy foods, and there are many vital nutrients in fruits and vegetables. Nutritionists tell us that five servings of fruits and vegetables a day can significantly reduce our risk of cancer. A good diet will often result in improved health, greater strength and more independence.

The California Department of Aging's "Stay Well" campaign emphasizes the importance of a healthy lifestyle for the state's 5 million seniors. The campaign is part of Governor Gray Davis' Aging with Dignity initiative.

"Seniors can get caught up in the slick advertising that hypes fast food," said Linda Hodge, lead nutritionist for the Department of Aging. "It's easy to lose track of some simple truths of healthy eating. As we grow older, there is a natural lessening of the senses of smell and taste, and it is easy to slide into unhealthy eating habits."

Even if you can't shop on a regular basis and purchase fresh fruits and vegetables, frozen and canned vegetables are a satisfactory substitute, according to US Department of Agriculture guidelines. "Some canned fruits and vegetables now come in one-serving pop-top cans, and that makes them very easy to use," Hodge noted. "One-serving juice boxes, ready-to-eat raw vegetables and dried or rehydrated fruits.

The "Stay Well" campaign encourages seniors, their families, caregivers and health care professionals to eat at least two servings of fruits and three servings of vegetables every day. Hodge urges plenty of dark-green leafy vegetables, orange fruits and vegetables and cooked dry beans and peas.

The Senior Farmer's Market Nutrition Pilot Project (see separate article) will make healthy foods more easily available. Hodge suggests purchasing only a small amount at a time because buying too much fresh produce can result in wasted food, and it will hurt in the pocketbook.

Protein is also an important source of nutrients. Meat, fish, poultry, cheese and other dairy products are high in protein. Quick and easy meals can be prepared using quick frozen, resealable packages of individual chicken breasts, wings or thighs.



Another childhood admonition was, "Drink your milk."

Milk is an excellent source of calcium, and calcium is increasingly important after age 50. Other sources of calcium, according to Hodge, are the dark-green leafy vegetables such as collards, spinach and turnip greens. Additionally, canned fish such as salmon and sardines are rich in calcium.

"There may be a need for moderation in a senior's diet when it comes to salt and sugar intake," Hodge said. "People with high blood pressure or diabetes need to be especially careful, but moderation is a good idea for everybody."

Family, friends and caregivers can contribute to good nutritional practices by offering to shop or cook once or twice a week. And a regular checkup on eating habits is a wise thing to do. Sometimes, just a reminder to make good food choices is enough to take us back to a healthy road to an independent lifestyle.

### Senior Farmer's Market Nutrition Pilot Project

This project, funded by the US Department of Agriculture, gives eligible seniors \$20 in California Farmers' Market coupons that can be redeemed for fresh fruits and vegetables at selected farmers markets statewide. The program began in May and continues through November 2001.

Seniors who participate in the California Department of Aging Brown Bag Food Distribution program or the congregate meal program are eligible for the coupons. The Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) coordinate coupon distribution. Contact your local AAA for additional information toll-free at 1-800-510-2020.

## Senior Wellness is Focus of Media Campaign

*To be 70 years young is sometimes far more cheerful and hopeful than to be 40 years old.*

— Oliver Wendell Holmes

Continuing Gov. Gray Davis's commitment to the well being of California's five million senior citizens, the State Department of Aging recently launched a statewide Senior Wellness education campaign, called "Stay Well."

The multi-media campaign is part of the governor's almost \$300 million "Aging with Dignity" initiative first announced in July 2000.

In announcing the initiative the governor said, "Our approach - consistent with our values - should be to keep families together by providing the services older Californians need to remain in their own homes, instead of nursing homes."

The \$1 million "Stay Well" campaign focuses on educating California's seniors, as well as their caregivers, families, and health care professionals, about the importance of living a healthy lifestyle so they can remain independent as long as possible.

Over the course of the campaign, which will be conducted in both English and Spanish, older Californians will learn about community-based and in-home care alternatives to institutional care, fitness, nutrition and other senior health issues, and will be given tips on how to stay safe and comfortable in a power emergency.

They will also be given information about the many resources and services available for seniors from both private and public entities in communities throughout the state.

The campaign's messages will be delivered through a variety of media including radio, television and newspaper advertising, brochures, posters and newsletters.

The media buy in three major markets – San Francisco Bay Area, Sacramento/Stockton and Los Angeles – is expected to reach an estimated 94 percent of seniors age 55 and over in those markets. Statewide, the campaign will reach almost three-quarters of California's five million seniors.

The themes for the campaign, which are aimed at

minimizing the many preventable disabilities and illnesses often associated with aging, were selected after focus group input from representative groups of seniors from throughout the state. Their comments and opinions were given careful consideration as the distinct English and Spanish-language campaigns were designed.

The California Department of Aging administers a broad range of home- and community-based services throughout California, working primarily with 33 Area Agencies on Aging, which service seniors in all geographic areas of the State. The Department serves as the leading advocate for the dignity, independence, health, and community involvement of older Californians and adults with functional impairments.

## Food Safety Update



Food safety is something we don't often think about, but it should always be a factor in our nutrition regimen. Food safety guidelines do change. New bacteria emerge and others become stronger. That may render older recipes out of date. Here are some current USDA checkpoints for food safety.

If you're still using a cookbook printed in the 1970s or earlier, it would be a good idea to put it aside and find a current reference. Twenty years ago, three of the most serious food-borne pathogens (*Campylobacter*, *Listeria* and *E. coli* O157:H7) were not even recognized as sources of food-borne disease and recipes for cooking may not have accounted for their characteristics. Just as you probably wouldn't use the owner's manual for your first car as a guide for operating a current model, early cookbooks are no longer a consistently reliable source of information about food preparation.

### Here are some current guidelines:

**Oven temperatures** should be at least 325 degrees Fahrenheit for cooking meat, poultry and casseroles containing them. Lower temperatures may not heat food fast enough to prevent bacterial growth.

**Eggs** should be cooked until the yolk and white are firm, not runny. Avoid recipes (including such foods as Caesar salad dressings, homemade ice cream, mayonnaise or hollandaise sauce) in which eggs remain raw or are only partially cooked.

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## Food Safety Update (continued from inside)

**Marinades** add flavor to meat and poultry dishes, but they do not kill bacteria. To marinate safely, place the dish in a covered container in the refrigerator, not on the counter. Use a glass container rather than metallic or glazed containers which may react to acidic ingredients in some marinades. If some of the marinade is to be used for basting during cooking, set that portion aside and do not put raw meat or poultry in it.

**Meat and poultry** should not necessarily be judged for doneness by whether it is "brown inside." The only way to really know if meat is done is to use a meat thermometer. (For more information on how to choose and use a food thermometer, read the publication "Kitchen Thermometers" on the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service Web site, [www.fsis.usda.gov/oa/thermy/ktherms.htm](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/oa/thermy/ktherms.htm)) Follow these temperature guidelines for cooking meat and poultry:

**Ground meat and poultry mixtures** (prepared as patties, meatloaf, etc.)

Beef, veal, lamb, pork: 160 F

Chicken, turkey: 165 F

NOTE: Thoroughly cook ground meat or poultry

**before** combining it with other ingredients in casseroles, meat sauces, etc.

### **Fresh beef, veal and lamb:**

Roasts and steaks:

- Medium rare: 145 F
- Medium: 160 F
- Well-done: 170 F

### **Fresh pork:**

- Chops, roasts, ribs:
- Medium: 160 F
- Well-done: 170 F

### **Ham:**

- Fresh (raw): 160 F
- Cured, fully cooked, (to reheat): 140 F

### **Poultry:**

- Whole chicken, turkey: 180 F
- Poultry breasts, roasts: 170 F
- Poultry thighs, wings (dark meat): 180 F (juices will run clear when cut)
- Stuffing (cooked separately): 165 F

Using a food thermometer helps assure that food reaches a safe internal temperature. It also helps you avoid overcooking a food, lowering its taste and quality.



Gray Davis, Governor, State of California  
Grantland Johnson, Secretary, Health and Human Services Agency  
Lynda Terry, Director, California Department of Aging

## StayWell

Community Resources for California's Seniors

### **California Department of Aging**

1600 K Street, Sacramento, California 95814  
[www.aging.ca.gov](http://www.aging.ca.gov)

**For senior services and  
programs available  
in your area call  
1-800-510-2020**

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